

Title: **Chuck vs the Card Game**

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Chapter 1: Chapter 1

The living room of the Bartowski house was starting to get cramped, and Chuck found himself getting squished further into the arm of the sofa as he tried to make enough room that Sarah could scoot closer, so that Morgan and Anna could fit next to her on the loveseat.

It wasn't going very well.

Irijaya was perched atop of his shoulder, and clung on tightly as he shifted awkwardly, Sarah's arm pressing into his side as she, too, struggled to make room for the new couple.

It was a tight squeeze (a *really* tight squeeze), and by the time they were all settled, Sarah's elbow was in his ribs, and his shoulder was pressed almost painfully against hers, and Chuck could barely even move, but they somehow managed to squeeze four people onto a couch meant for two.

And, *meanwhile*, Casey and Le'kayor got an armchair all to themselves, and for some reason, Devon and Ellie got the *actual* couch to sit on. They weren't even squished together, and Cardea and Cyorin had *plenty* of room to stretch their wings. Heck, Cardea could probably stretch her wings to their fullest, and she'd still have plenty of room to move around in. Especially since she was sitting on Devon's shoulder. And she was a *peregrine falcon*. Not exactly a small animal. ...Not that any of them actually particularly had *big* daemons, though. Well, besides Casey and Le'kayor, but they didn't count.

Irijaya pressed herself closer to Chuck's shirt as he tried shifting positions again, and asked the room loudly, "Remind me again why we *all* have to sit over here?"

Cyorin fluffed his feathers up, his version of an eye-roll. "Because that's the *love* seat, and this night is about exploring your love lives!"

"And we are sitting over here," Ellie added in, "Because Devon and I are already married. And because it's our house." She smiled widely, and Chuck knew she was enjoying this 'party' *far* too much.

"So..." Devon said slowly, sitting up seriously and turning his head to look everyone in the eye one by one, "Who wants to go first?"

Morgan's hand shot up before he even finished getting the words out of his mouth, and Devon grinned. "Good man!" He cried, grabbing the small deck of yellow-gold cards from the coffee table they

were all situated around, and holding it out so that Morgan could reach it.

Morgan went to grab the top card, but Janos scurried along his arm and snatched it up before he could. Devon quickly withdrew the deck, and Morgan glared at his daemon in betrayal.

"Hey, no fair!" he whined.

Janos just grinned widely, then held up the card and read off, "In as much detail as possible, what is your favorite color?" The small marmoset wrinkled his nose in disgust. "What is our favorite *color*? How is this supposed to help deepen our relationship?"

Anna rolled her eyes, and pulled the card out of Janos' hold. (Something that left Chuck staring at her, completely flabbergasted by her forward behavior. Janos didn't seem surprised, though, and neither did Morgan. That was...strange, to say the least.)

"Pale green, sort of like mint colored, but a bit brighter." She said cheerfully, as though taking something from *someone else's daemon* was something completely normal.

Chuck narrowed his eyes slightly once her words actually registered in his mind, realizing that she was describing the exact shade of her daemon's scales.

"You mean like Izanul." He said skeptically.

He felt weird talking to someone he could only see out of the corner of his eye.

Anna leaned forward as though sensing his predicament, and smiled at him. "Exactly!"

The daemon in question was lounging in her lap, eyes closed in what might have been a nap. You could never be too sure with reptile daemons, but Chuck was pretty sure he'd seen the iguana sleeping in Anna's backpack several times at the Buy More.

That wasn't really something you *commented on*, though, so Chuck pressed himself further into the sofa, and tried to keep his arms from getting too much in Sarah's way as Morgan began describing his favorite shade of brown, complete with wild hand gestures as he conjured up images of a forgotten tree in the deepest part of an expansive rainforest.

Then it was Casey's turn to pick a card, and he leaned forward grudgingly, taking one from the deck with a sniff of disdain.

The point of the game was to pick a card, and then you and your teammate answered the question on it. You'd do this until you ran out of cards (or some people set a time limit) and then you'd have to try and remember as many of your partner's answers as possible. The team that got the most right answers won.

And since Casey wasn't dating anyone at the moment, he had to answer the question, and then try to remember how one of his past relationships would have answered. Which was really unfair, because he could just make something up off the top of his head if he wanted to, and no one would be the wiser.

But he was disqualified from earning any actual points, so Chuck couldn't really complain.

Casey stared at the card for a few long moments, then sighed loudly, and rolled his eyes. He really didn't want to be there, and he wasn't afraid to make it obvious. Casey adopted a huge smile, and read the card out in a high, mockingly cheerful voice. "Do you prefer *slow* dancing, or something with *energy*?"

Ellie sent him a silent glare, and he made a face at her in response.

When she didn't relent, he rolled his eyes. "I like something in between." He finally admitted grudgingly, "Where there are slow parts, but then you get to pick them up and twirl them around."

Le'kayor nodded in agreement, and wriggled slightly, looking almost ridiculously happy next to her human's grumpiness. Even sitting on the floor, her head came up to Casey's shoulder, which made it all the funnier with their faces next to one another.

Chuck saw Morgan lean forward, but couldn't see his friend's face when he said eagerly, "Come on, Kace, you know the rules, did your last ex prefer slow, or something with *energy*?"

Chuck didn't need to see Morgan's face to imagine the suggestive way he was waggling his eyebrows.

Fortunately, the way the sofas had been arranged for their little game meant that Chuck was in the perfect position to see Casey. And he was not disappointed. The glare Casey shot towards Morgan was hot enough to melt steel, and Morgan let out a high-pitched "Eep!" and quickly ducked back against the sofa.

Before Casey could open his mouth to say something, Devon butted in, "Come on, Casey, Morgan's right. I mean, unless of course, you want to quit the game and forfeit your slice of boston creme pie..." He trailed off teasingly, and managed to hold Casey's glare until he finally relented.

Casey crossed his arms over his chest. "-rything..." He muttered under his breath, just barely loud enough to hear.

"Oh, I'm sorry, what was that?" Ellie asked innocently, "I think you need to speak up a bit so we can hear. And remember, you have to add detail, or it doesn't count."

"And if it doesn't count, then no pie for you." Cyorin added smugly.

Casey crossed his arms tighter. "I said," He said slowly, firmly, staring directly at the monochrome duck for his comment, "She liked everything. Square dancing, ballet, waltzes, any sort of dance you could think of, and she'd love it to bits. Hell," he grunted, "She even made up a few of her own." He seemed to suddenly realize that he was still holding the card, and tossed it back to Devon. "There, happy? now?"

Chuck could have sworn he heard him mutter, *she's not an ex*. Under his breath, but he wasn't sure. And what did that even mean? He was still *dating* someone even though he was going to be guarding Chuck indefinitely?

Yeesh, talk about a long-distance relationship.

Cardea snatched the card he'd thrown out of the air

with her beak in a motion so fast Chuck didn't even have time to track it. "Yep!" She replied cheerfully. She handed the card back to Devon, and it was only after he held the deck out toward Chuck that he realized with horror that it was his and Sarah's turn to answer questions.

"Oh, our turn, yay." He said weakly, disentangling one arm and reaching out to grab a card.

He flipped it over, and felt his eyes widen in alarm.

What is something strange about yourself that no one would believe?

He looked up from the card, and attempted to snatch another one from the deck before it could be pulled away. "You know, I think I'd like a different card. This one isn't all that interesting, and-"

"Oh, give me that." Sarah pulled the card from his hand with a small, teasing smile before he could say another word. "What is something strange about yourself that no one would believe?" She read out, her eyes lighting up as she looked directly into Chuck's eyes. "Something you don't want me knowing about?"

"Ahaha...uhhh, maybe?" Why did he always have to laugh when he was nervous?

"Well fine then," She said, batting lightly at his arm, "I'll start." She narrowed her eyes, and looked up towards the ceiling thoughtfully. "Hmm..."

G'yaril suddenly appeared, poking his tiny head out from her hair. He whispered something in her ear, and Sarah's smile widened.

"Okay," She said, leaning forward so that everyone could see her, "So, this is going to sound ridiculous, but I swear to you, I'm not lying." Chuck saw her look around at everyone seriously, and when she turned to look back at him, he couldn't quite figure out what to call the expression on her face. Besides serious, obviously.

"So what is it already?" Casey growled when the room had been silent for a few moments.

Sarah breathed in deeply, and when she let it back out, she said, "I met an alien."

A cricket chose that moment to start singing outside the open window, and Chuck had to remind himself firmly that he wasn't supposed to laugh.

He wasn't very good with self control, though, and a loud snort escaped him before he could stop himself.

Sarah sent him a narrow-eyed look from the corner of her eye, but Morgan spoke before Chuck could defend himself.

"Oh come on, that's cheating!" He said, throwing his hands into the air, "No one would believe that so of *course* she'd pick it! That's just completely unfair, how do we know she's not making it up?"

"Morgan," Devon said chidingly, "It's not a contest yet, and if Sarah says she's met an alien, well...Okay I don't believe her, but I believe that she *believes* she met an alien." He turned to look at Sarah, and raised one eyebrow. "But remember, you gotta add detail, or it doesn't count."

Sarah smiled again, and Chuck was suddenly struck

once again (because it happened a lot) by how beautiful she looked when she was happy.

He really hoped she wasn't just faking it to keep their cover.

"I can add detail," She said easily, then shrugged slightly, "Though not a lot. I was a kid at the time, so I've kind of forgotten some things."

"Well go on," Anna encouraged, shifting sideways so that she had her legs curled under her, and her back leaning against Morgan's shoulder, "Tell us!" Izanul twitched his tail, but otherwise didn't make any sign of protest at her moving.

Sarah rested her hands in her lap. "Alright, alright, so, I was somewhere around six at the time, and my father and I were on a camping trip, all the way up in Washington. Well, he forgot to check on the weather before we left, and by the time it was dark, we were hiding out in our tent as rain just *poured* down. And I mean *poured*. Like, that was probably the worst rainstorm I have ever been in in my entire life.

My father somehow managed to fall asleep, but I sat up for hours, listening to the rain and wondering if there was going to be a flood." She paused for a breath, "Eventually, I think I must have fallen asleep, because the rain had stopped without my noticing, and the sun was just starting to rise. And I *really* needed to use the bathroom, so I opened the door to the tent, and crawled outside. There was mud *everywhere*, and obviously I didn't want to go to the bathroom in *mud*, so-

"Eww." Morgan muttered.

Sarah shot him a look, and he held his hands up in surrender.

Chuck just sat back, enraptured by her story and eager for her to continue. He knew it was probably going to be ridiculous, but the way she told the story, it just felt completely *normal* and exciting. On second thought, the whole room was focused on her, and as far as Chuck could tell, no one seemed bored.

"*Anyways*," Sarah continued, "I decided to look for somewhere dryer, so I headed off into the trees. And...that's when I saw the rabbit. It must have been someone's pet that got loose, because it was black with white spots, minus the mud, of course. And, being a little kid, I decided that I wanted to pet it. So I tried walking up to it, but it kept running away, and eventually I ended up getting completely lost in the woods because of this rabbit." She laughed softly, and shook her head, looking embarrassed. "I knew I was lost, and my father would be angry, but I just kept following the rabbit. It felt like forever passed before I came to another clearing, and *that* was when I met the alien."

And again, Morgan interrupted. "Oh, oh, what did it look like? Was it all gross and slimy? Did it have tentacles?"

Chuck caught the sneer Casey sent his friend. "That's not what aliens look like, you nitwit."

Chuck's eyebrows flew to his forehead. "Oh, sorry, I didn't realize you were the local expert." He said

sarcastically, defending his friend automatically, and only realizing after the words had left his mouth just *who* he was talking to in that tone of voice.

Oh, I'm so dead.

But instead of the anger he'd expected, Le'kayor let out a barking laugh, and Casey's mouth twitched upward. "Well," He said, leaning forward with his hands steepled, voice eerily calm, "If we're all being ridiculous, maybe I *am* secretly an expert on aliens. Maybe *I've* met some too." He turned to glare at Morgan. "And *none of them* were gross and slimy."

"Well, except for that *one*." Le'kayor added in cheerfully, "But that doesn't count."

"Yeah, that one didn't count." Casey agreed.

"Um, *excuse me*, excuse me," Ellie interrupted, waving her hands to quiet them down, "I believe it was *Sarah's* turn to speak?"

When the room quieted-albeit grudgingly, in the case of Morgan and Casey-she gestured for Sarah to continue, and Sarah smiled (Wow, Chuck really loved her smile) at Ellie in thanks.

"I hate to disappoint you, Morgan." She began, "But the alien was not gross, or slimy, or even green. In fact, it was a *robot*."

Irijaya tilted her head to the side, brushing one ear against Chuck's neck and raising goosebumps down his spine. "A *robot*?" She wasn't impressed.

"Yes, a robot." Sarah replied firmly, turning to look at the sugar glider, "A very big, very shiny robot. It was

walking through the clearing when I followed the rabbit towards it, and at first I didn't realize what it was, because I could barely see anything." She frowned suddenly.

"Did I mention I wear contacts?" She addressed this question to the room, and everyone (excluding Casey, Chuck noticed) shook their heads or shrugged.

"Oh." She said simply, "Well, so you know, my eyesight is kind of horrible, and back then I hadn't gotten glasses yet. So I was standing at the edge of a clearing that I'd just chased a rabbit into, and all I hear is this weird hissing noise, and loud thudding." She lifted one hand into the air, and waved it toward the ceiling. "And then I look up, and there's this *huge* glittering *thing* just coming towards me, and I realized that every time it stepped forward, its legs were making the hissing noise, hydraulics, I guess. And when I realized what it was, I just stood there, because I wasn't sure if I was dreaming or not, to be honest.

"The rabbit was right by my feet, just barely a foot away, just out of my reach. I thought for sure it was going to run away again-and did I mention how loud this thing was when it walked? But the rabbit just sat there as this *massive robot* walked over, and then the robot bent down, and picked the rabbit up off the ground, like it was the easiest thing to do, like I hadn't been trying to do that *exact thing* for the past hour or more. And then it looked at me, with the single red, glowing light on its face, and said to me, 'Thank you for returning Rhea.' in this mechanical,

echoey voice, and turned around, and walked away...And that's how I met an alien."

The silence that followed lasted barely two seconds.

Morgan hummed loudly, skeptical, "How do you know the robot was an alien? Who's to say it wasn't just your average, every-day, human-made robot?"

Sarah's eyebrows rose incredulously. "When was the last time *you* saw a robot wandering around?" She demanded.

Oh, no...

Morgan saw his opening, and leaned forward *just* so that Chuck could see the huge grin on his face. "Well, as a *matter of fact*," He said slowly, "You're sitting next to one right now!" At the sight of the glare Chuck sent him, he gasped loudly in pretended shock, "Oh, Chuck didn't tell you he's a robot? And Ellie too? Chuck, man, relationships are supposed to be based on trust, how could you keep something so important from your girlfriend?" Morgan shook his head in mock disappointment.

And once again, Chuck was in the perfect position to catch the expression that crossed Casey's face. Which...probably would have been more helpful if he'd been able to decipher exactly what that expression was.

Chuck buried his face in his hands when Sarah turned to look at him, confused. "Argh! Okay, okay, you want to know something you won't believe?" He peeked out from behind his fingers, to see her nod. Well, this was going to be embarrassing. "Okay, so you know when

you go to log into some websites, it asks you to fill out a captcha, where it shows you some weird looking letters, and you have to type out what they say?"

Something like amusement settled on Sarah's face.

"Yeah, who doesn't?"

"Well..." Chuck trailed off, feeling stupid.

Irijaya sighed, and scrambled to the top of his head.

"We can't read them." She said flatly. "At all. We've tried refreshing the page over and over and over again, but nothing it gives us ever makes sense!"

"Hey, and Ellie can't read them either!" Chuck said defensively, knowing that at any moment Morgan would start in on the irony of Chuck working at the Buy More as a *tech assistant* when he couldn't even log into an *online game* without help.

"You really can't read those?" Sarah's voice had risen with incredulity, and he knew exactly what she was thinking. He had millions of government secrets *successfully* stored in his brain, but he couldn't read a simple captcha?

He shrugged weakly, then crossed his arms over his chest and glared past her at Morgan, who was moving his arms robotically just to make fun of him. Janos was clinging tightly to his shirt in an attempt not to fall off.

"Alright, Morgan, that's enough." Devon said firmly, "Besides, it's Anna's turn again." He held the deck out toward her, silently putting an end to the teasing.

Chuck couldn't see Anna's face now that he was smushed back against the couch again with Sarah in

the way, but he was going to guess that she was smiling, based on Devon's own expression.

"If you were stranded on a deserted island," (Oh, Chuck swore if it asked what kind of sandwich you'd take with you he was going to die of laughter) "How would you try to escape?"

Darn.

"Hmmm..." Anna said thoughtfully, "Well, it depends on how I got there, really. Was I on a ship that sank? A plane crash? Was I randomly teleported there by some vengeful god? What kind of stuff do I have with me, or am I just naked, with only my wits to help me survive? Because if I didn't have anything except for what I could make, I'd probably stay there for a while, stocking up on resources, and then I'd make a boat with all my stuff in it, and sail to the nearest landmass." She shrugged, "That, or I wouldn't even try to escape. I'd just turn the island into my own personal kingdom." She turned to look at Morgan invitingly.

"*Well*," he drawled out, "First of all, assuming that I was transported there by some vengeful god, I'd immediately create a summoning spell, summon the god back there, and trap them inside a rock. Which I would then use to start a magical fire, which would get the attention of any ship within a hundred miles of the island, and then they'd pick me up, bring me back to whatever country they were from, where I'd start my own religion dedicated to the continuous insulting of the Idiot Rock. Every time you insult it, you get five extra points towards getting into the Island Paradise

that we all aspire to." He sighed dramatically, and wiped a fake tear from his eye.

At least he hadn't mentioned sandwiches.

Casey took his next card, and raised his eyebrows at what it said. "*How many languages do you speak.* What kind of dumb-" He stopped himself suddenly, then shook his head in annoyance. "English and Mandarin mostly." he said tersely, and Chuck was given the distinct impression that the subject annoyed Casey greatly.

"*Woah*, really?" Morgan broke the silence again, staring at Casey with unabashed curiosity.

"*Xiàng wǒ yīgè gèng hǎo de wèntí.*" Le'kayor retorted.

"Not *literally*," Casey interrupted when Anna sat up straighter, looking like she was going to say something.

"What?" Morgan said suspiciously, looking between the two, "What did Le'kayor say?"

Anna shrugged. "She said to ask a different question."

Well, at least they knew Casey wasn't lying.

"Okay," Chuck said curiously, "But what about your, err..." He remembered Casey muttering about how the woman who liked dancing wasn't his ex, "Partner? How many languages do they speak?"

The horrible thought suddenly occurred to him that dead people didn't count as exes, and Casey had spoken of the mysterious woman in the past tense.

But Casey's mouth just turned upward in a smirk.

"Too many to count." He said, "I'm not even joking.

Here, just-hold on a moment." He turned his hands into fists, and held them up in front of him, then started counting off, "English, Russian, Chinese, Ancient Egyptian, Abydonian, Spanish, German, Mandarin-that's actually how we met, believe it or not-um, Latin, Greek..." He stared down at his hands. "I'm running out of fingers here. Uh, he also spoke...what was it...oh, uh, Mayan or whatever it's called, and Babylonian, Aztec, he could read Norse runes, plus middle English, and Goa-er," He cleared his throat loudly. "I think you get the picture."

He tossed the card back to Devon.

"Unless my memory is failing me, I do believe it's Sarah's turn." He said, adopting a strange, almost western accent out of nowhere.

Chuck glanced at Sarah's face, trying to figure out if this was *normal* for Casey. But her expression didn't give anything away, so Chuck was going to just assume for now that Casey randomly swinging from grumpy to joking was a fairly regular occurrence.

Sarah took one of the offered cards and read, "*What is your favorite animal?*" She raised an eyebrow, and looked at Devon. "This answer doesn't really require a lot of detail."

Cardea ruffled her wings thoughtfully. "This one you can just say the animal, but for the next turn you have to pick two cards."

Chuck tried to hide his disappointment.

"Well, I've liked tigers since I was a little girl," Sarah said, tilting her head slightly to the side, "But I also

like hummingbirds." She turned to Chuck, indicating that it was his turn to answer.

"Polar bears." He said without hesitation. "They're so fluffy and cute."

He heard Casey snort softly.

"*And*," Chuck added in, glaring across the coffee table, "Global warming is posing a huge threat to them right now, so the more people that like them, the more chance we have at saving them."

Casey muttered something Chuck couldn't hear, and Le'kayor's ears drooped slightly.

But then Devon was passing the deck towards Anna, and Chuck decided that he might as well *pretend* to be having fun with the game.

After all, they still had the entire deck of cards to get through still, and the boston creme pie wouldn't be done for another half hour.

So Chuck sat back against the couch with Sarah's arm pressed painfully into his, and wondered when he would be able to see her smile again.